

“Human beings deserve to be treated decently wherever they are”

Trump administration revokes visa of Wole Soyinka, first African writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature

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On October 28, Wole Soyinka, world-renowned Nigerian poet, author, playwright and professor and the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, revealed that the US government had revoked a visa previously issued to him.

The revocation of Soyinka’s US visa is not an isolated incident but part of a sweeping drive by the Trump administration to criminalize political dissent and equate opposition to the US government with “terrorism.” It comes amid a wave of visa cancellations and detentions targeting journalists, academics, artists and students who have spoken against the genocide in Gaza or criticized the administration and its reactionary policies.

A gifted writer and intellectual, Soyinka, born July 13, 1934, in Abeokuta, Nigeria, has taught at universities around the world, including Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and Yale. In 1966, while Chair of Drama at the University of Ibadan, Soyinka was arrested and imprisoned for 22 months, held in solitary confinement by the Nigerian federal military government under General Yakubu Gowon.

In Tuesday’s press conference, Soyinka, a gifted political satirist, explained how the US government revoked his visa. He began by reading “the first line of a rather curious love letter I received from an embassy.”

Reading from the letter Soyinka said,

Consulate General of the United States of America
Lagos, Nigeria October, 23, 2025.

Dear Mr. Soyinka, this letter serves as official notification by the United States consulate general in Lagos that the nominated visa listed below has been revoked pursuant to the authority contained in the US Department of State Regulation (blah blah blah blah) and it’s no longer valid application for entry into the United States etc.

Soyinka recalled “the history of this visa which was issued when an accident happened to my green card which some of you might remember.”

After Trump was first inaugurated in 2017 Soyinka recalled predicting that Trump’s “first mission in office would be ... withdrawing all permanent documents” especially “the permanent residence card so I said I will save him time by having an accident happen to my green card ... when I was looking at my green card it fell between the fingers of a pair of scissors and it got cut into a couple of pieces that’s what happened to my green card.

“I demoted myself ...”

After this “accident,” which Soyinka spoke publicly about at the time he received a “letter from the Internal Revenue Service of the United States of America saying that an audit of my tax returns was about to take place going back about five years.”

After noting the “interesting coincidence about this notice of an upcoming audit just after an accident happened to my green card” Soyinka went to the US embassy to straighten out the situation because he did not want to be seen as a “tax dodger.”

He said after leaving the embassy he was issued a B-1/B-2 visa (a business and tourist visa) by the US government. Since being issued those visas, Soyinka has not been charged with a crime, yet he received a letter from the US consulate earlier this month stating that certain “facts” had come to the government’s attention and that they wanted him to come to the embassy to answer a “few questions.” If he did not, the government would have no choice but to revoke his visa.

Soyinka courageously rejected the request explaining,

I spoke frankly, I’m not interested. It has nothing to do with me personally, it has to do with the treatment which I know the brutal cruel and often unbelievable treatment being meted out to strangers, immigrants, even in some cases permanent residents which of course

include quite a number of Nigerians.

I know of a number of Nigerians who are turned back. I mean, who live in the United States, who have lived there all their lives, saw them have businesses, they have grown-up children, families who are even citizens of our country, but we just left in the normal way, to visit home and then found at the airport they were not allowed to get on that plane because in the meantime either their visas were under examination or had in fact been revoked. But they were not allowed to go back etc.

He concluded, “So it’s not really about me, I’m not interested in going back to the United States. Sad, but a principle is involved, human beings deserve to be treated decently wherever they are, wherever they drop their buckets, even places where they’re just visiting briefly.”

Soyinka noted that the “visa doling department is now looking into past history ... anybody with any past criminal act, even felony, just misdemeanor, was qualified for revocation of visa.”

Soyinka recounted the revocation of Oscar Arias’s visa in April of this year. He noted that the former president of Costa Rica’s visa was revoked after he likened Trump to a “Roman emperor” in a social media post, which he said cheekily, “was not very nice.”

So I had to look to see whether I had committed any similar crime and I remembered that I referred to him as the white version of Idi Amin, you know, dictators are very difficult to please. I would have thought that he was pleased, I mean Idi Amin was a man of international stature, a statesman, a first class democrat.

He also called himself the King of Scotland, he called himself a liberator. In fact, he said he was going to liberate Scotland from the grip of the British ... he was liberating people everywhere, some he even liberated them from their lives.

So when I called Donald Trump “Idi Amin,” I thought I was paying him a compliment.

He recalled that Trump said he was going to “rule as a dictator, he’s been behaving like a dictator, he should be proud to be acknowledged as a dictator, first class.”

Soyinka noted that he had previously written plays about the Ugandan dictator Amin, “Maybe it’s about time to write a play about Donald Trump, maybe when he hears I am paying him the same literary compliment as I paid Idi Amin maybe he will reconsider and return my visa.”

Soyinka ended the press conference referring back to the letter sent to him by the US consulate’s office, “We request

you bring your visa to the US consulate general Lagos for physical cancellation...”

With a smile Soyinka said, “I like people who have a sense of humor and this is one of the most humorous sentences or requests I’ve had in all my life. That I should bring my passport to the consulate to have it stamped on a page, canceled. Would any of you like to volunteer in my place for me because I’m a little bit busy and rushed ...”

The persecution of Soyinka, a 91-year-old teacher and artist, for his opinions exposes the immense fragility of the American state and of the capitalist system as a whole. Under capitalism, democratic rights for all, citizens or not, are being systematically destroyed while fascists and Nazi sympathizers are rewarded with government power, and figures like Elon Musk receive multi-billion dollar bonuses.

The First Amendment is a dead letter for millions of people in the United States. Earlier this week, British journalist Sami Hamdi was seized by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at San Francisco International Airport as he began a speaking tour sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Hamdi, a frequent commentator on BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera, was denounced as a “terrorist” by a DHS spokesperson for the “crime” of condemning Israel’s mass murder of Palestinians. He joins a growing list of journalists and students, like Mahmoud Khalil, Rümeysa Öztürk, Momodou Taal and others, who have been targeted by the Trump regime for expressing opposition to genocide.

In August, Fox News reported that the State Department had revoked more than 6,000 student visas since January, with hundreds of cases linked to political activism, particularly on campuses where students have organized anti-war and pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

The targeting of Soyinka also follows the Trump administration’s revocation of US visas for the British punk-rap duo Bob Vylan, whose performance at Glastonbury included anti-genocide chants denouncing Israel’s massacre in Gaza. Their “crime” was to articulate the sentiments of millions of youth and workers who oppose the US-backed genocide. Trump’s fascistic regime rewards war criminals like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (and Trump himself) and silences artists, journalists and students.



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